Psycho killer on highway to hell

Tenderness
Director John Polson
(M) 101 minutes, US
★★½

IF YOU thought riding in cars with boys was fraught with danger, try riding in a car with a psychopathic killer, albeit one who is trying to kick the habit.

Eric (Jon Foster) is that psychopath, a 17-year-old recently and controversially released from juvenile detention. He was locked up for multiple murders.

In the other corner is Lori (talented Canadian actor Sophie Traub), a troubled teen infatuated with Eric despite his dirty deeds. She joins her new friend on a road trip.

Hot on their trail is retired cop Cristofuoro (Russell Crowe), the man responsible for locking Eric up in the first place. He reckons Eric will kill again. "You know that. I know that. I'm going to stop you doing it."

As for Eric himself, he just wants to make a fresh start. Resist the urge to kill. But gosh, that pretty little Lori rocks up one day and won't leave him alone.

Really, it's like Lori has a death wish the way she carries on, being all suggestive and putting herself into ridiculously unsafe situations.

"I'm basically a virgin," she gushes.

As fans of *Twilight* would know, even vegetarian vampires struggle with the primal urge to kill humans when led into temptation. And Eric is no different.

Violins get a regular workout in quick back-and-forths as Sydney-born director John Polson tries to create tension, somewhat unsuccessfully. Will Eric kill Lori or won't he?

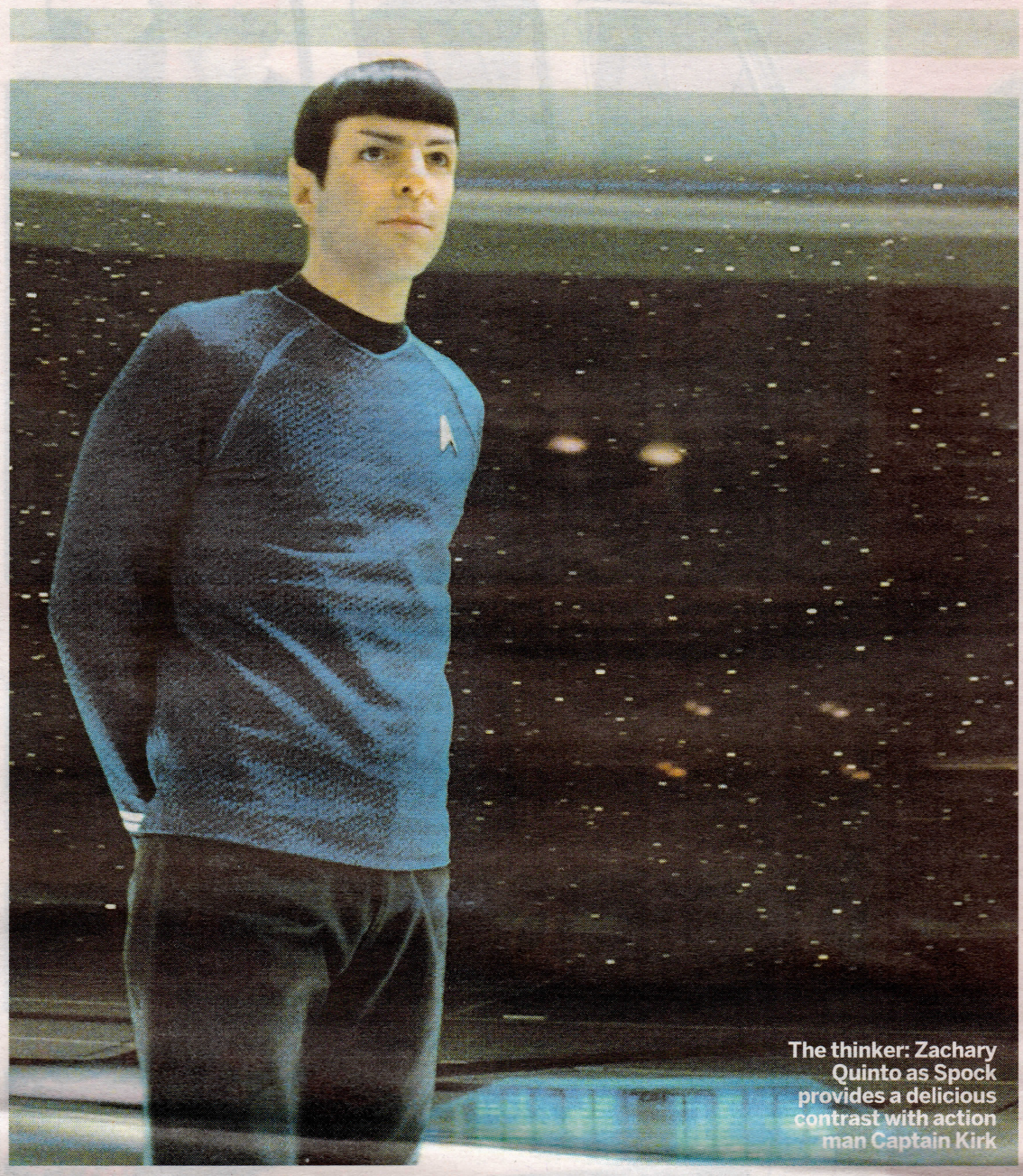
The actors play their parts well and the cinematography has its moments, but the storyline is as dodgy as Cristofuoro's moustache. Dodgy.

If you'd like to try a little *Tenderness*, be my guest. Otherwise, you can next catch Russell Crowe in *State of Play*, a political thriller that opens in cinemas on May 28.

Colin Newton



Wheel deal: Sophie Traub and Jon Foster on a road trip with a twist



The thinker: Zachary Quinto as Spock provides a delicious contrast with action man Captain Kirk

Enterprising adventure

The space classic boldly returns, with loads of action, great characters and a witty script, writes **Sally Browne**

Star Trek
Director JJ Abrams
(M) 126 minutes
★★★★

ALL the cliches have been used: it's a movie that goes where no *Star Trek* film has gone before; it's *Star Trek*, but not as we know it.

So I'll use this one: be prepared to enter warp speed. This is *Star Trek* on steroids.

Director JJ Abrams has created a *Star Trek* movie for the *next* next generation, and this film delivers the goods.

No background knowledge is necessary, as the film takes viewers back to the day James T Kirk is born. We meet baddy Eric Bana as Nero, a time-travelling Romulan set on revenge who sets chaos in motion, kicking off the film's alternate time line.

From the start, Abrams straps you in and turns the adrenalin factor way up. The young Kirk, a daredevil adrenalin junkie, and the thoughtful half-Vulcan Spock make a delicious contrast.

Kirk (Chris Pine) joins the Starfleet Academy, where he meets his soon-to-be comrades — the humorous and engaging Karl Urban as Dr McCoy; Zoe Saldana as the sassy and beautiful Uhura; John Cho, from the *Harold and Kumar* films, as a loveable Sulu; and Zachary Quinto as Spock. Simon Pegg as a perfectly cast Scotty joins later.

Each gets their due screen-time and feels well realised — you can't wait to be spending more time with them in future films.

Although this is a film heavy on action, its strength are its characters and witty script.

The cast provides a host of new heart-throbs of various personalities, and there's a neat love interest twist. (Senior *Star Trek* officials tell me that there was always a debate between female fans of the original 1960s series over who was cutest, Leonard Nimoy's Spock or William Shatner's Kirk.)

There are no dull moments, and although the film is mostly aimed at non-fans, Trekkies are rewarded with plenty of famous lines, in-jokes and allusions to the original television series.

What is missing, however, is the series' famous Shakespearean edge. The plot is a simple revenge tale (similar to *Star Trek II: Wrath of Khan*) and the morality tales are, frankly, dubious.

Especially difficult to swallow — and this is no small point — is the way Spock and Kirk's relationship is forged. Spock's integrity is compromised — and, in a way, his whole character as a Vulcan.

One of the great things about the original series was how it showed how brawn (Kirk) and brain (Spock) could work together.

But this film resets that relationship and instead their friendship is based on, essentially, a lie and a takeover. Once again, as happens in so many of these action films, brawn beats brain.

It's hard to believe this is only Abrams's second film. He certainly knows how to steer a ship. We hope this won't be the final frontier.

***Star Trek* opens in cinemas on Thursday.**

★ HIGHS & LOWS

+ The characters, the comedy
- The Spock-Kirk relationship

